
***** THE BECKER FAMILY *****

THREE CENTURIES AS MENNONITES

It was in the small Polish town of Kokotzcy, sometime near the middle of the seventeenth century, that a certain Johann Becker was born. According to the oldest records of the Przechovka Mennonite Church, this Johann Becker left the Lutheran Church and became the first of his name to become a Mennonite.

It is believed that all Low German Mennonite Beckers since that time are the descendants of this Johann Becker. The records indicate that his first wife was an Unrau, and it is likely that he became a Mennonite partly because of his desire to marry her.

The Przechovka records further indicate that this Johann Becker had a total of eleven children, and his descendants are listed for a number of generations, all the way to the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. These earliest Beckers lived in a number of Polish villages near Przechovka, including Konopat, Zigus, and Jeziorka. In later years, the family spread throughout much of Poland, into the region known as Volhynia, and finally into the Molotschna Mennonite Colony in South Russia.

It was in the village of Karolswalde, Volhynia, on July 25, 1828, that a child was born to old Peter Becker and his young wife, Helena nee Schmidt. Peter Becker, a widower in his late sixties, had late in life married Helena, who was only 23 years old. This child born in 1828 was their first, and they named him Jacob. Jacob was followed in 1833 by a younger brother, Benjamin, and in 1840 by a sister, Maria. Old Peter Becker died in the village of Pastwa, Molotschna, on March 1, 1842, leaving behind his still young widow and his three minor children.

All three of these Becker children became active participants in the birth and early development of the Mennonite Brethren Church, a new Mennonite movement which appeared during the 1860's in Russia. All three of them have many descendants who today still belong to Mennonite Brethren Churches in the United States.

JACOB P. BECKER, the oldest of the three, was one of the eighteen original members of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Indeed, shortly after the church was founded on January 4, 1860, Jacob was elected the first *Lehrer*, or minister, of the new church. His first wife was Anna Goertz, the widow of a certain Heinrich Hooge. She died in 1860, and none of their four children survived infancy.

Jacob's second wife was Margaretha Wiens. Their marriage occurred on September 30, 1862, causing a storm of turmoil in the Molotschna Colony. The leaders of the established Mennonite churches, not yet willing to recognize the newly-formed Mennonite Brethren Church, declared the marriage invalid since it had been performed by Elder Heinrich Huebert. He was not yet recognized as a legitimate elder by the ruling factions of the colony. Despite this shaky beginning, Jacob and Margaretha enjoyed more than 45 years of marriage, and raised six children, all of whom have descendants in the Mennonite Brethren Church today.

Their children were as follows:

1. **Jacob H. Becker**, born May 27, 1865, at Wohldemfuerst in the Kuban region of Russia. He married Florentina

Schultz and together they had fifteen children. Since they lived most of their later years in Shafter, California, most of their descendants now live in various parts of California.

2. **Frank J. Becker**, born October 22, 1868, also in Wohldemfuerst. He married Katharina Krause, and they had ten children.

3. **Helena Becker**, born April 10, 1870, in Wohldemfuerst. She married John L. Hodel and had twelve children, whose families now mainly live in various parts of California.

4. **Abraham J. Becker**, born February 25, 1872, in Wohldemfuerst. He married Magdalena Hergert, and they had seven children. This couple served many years as missionaries to the Comanche Indians, living at the Post Oak Mission in Oklahoma.

5. **Margaret Becker**, born December 1, 1875. She married Daniel Sudermann and had seven children. Most of their descendants reside in the midwest, particularly in the states of Kansas and Oklahoma.

6. **Anna Becker**, born in October, 1878. She married Peter A. Kliwer and had a total of twelve children.

BENJAMIN BEKKER, Jacob P. Becker's younger brother, was born November 30, 1833, in Poland. Unlike his brother Jacob, he usually spelled his name *Bekker*, and his descendants therefore generally use this spelling of their last name. Benjamin was also an important leader of the early Mennonite Brethren Church. He was selected to be the first *Reiseprediger*, or traveling evangelist, of the new church. He married Anna Neufeld in 1864, and they had the following twelve children:

Jacob Peter and Margaretha Wiens Becker





Maria Becker Regier

1. **Heinrich Bekker**, born April 7, 1865.
2. **Anna Bekker**, born December 5, 1867.
3. **Helena Bekker**, born September 30, 1869. She married Henry Flaming.
4. **Maria Bekker**, born August 16, 1871. She married Abraham Janzen.
5. **Benjamin Bekker**, born July 23, 1873, who died as a young child.
6. **Katharine Bekker**, born December 29, 1874. She married Peter W. Wiens.
7. **Benjamin Bekker**, born December 17, 1876. He married Augusta Nipkau.
8. **Agatha Bekker**, born February 18, 1879.
9. **Jakob Bekker**, born July 14, 1881, who died in 1883.
10. **Sara Bekker**, born October 23, 1883. She married Bernhard A. Bekker.
11. **Abraham Bekker**, born April 28, 1886.
12. **Aganetha Bekker** or **Agnes**, born June 12, 1888. She married J.B. Ratzlaff.

MARIA BECKER, Jacob P. Becker's sister, was born on November 30, 1840. She was married to Abraham Regier, who came from the village of Rudnerweide, Molotschna. He was also one of the earliest members of the Mennonite Brethren Church. They had four children, but only two daughters survived infancy. They were:

1. **Maria Regier**, born July 28, 1876. She was a deaconess in the Mennonite Brethren Church, and served as a missionary for several years at the Post Oak Mission in

Oklahoma. She married Dietrich D. Peters in 1904, but died in childbirth the following year.

2. **Sarah Regier**, born May 6, 1879. She was married to Henry Bartel, the son of Heinrich Bartel, another influential leader of the early Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia. It is an interesting sidelight that the first baptism in the Mennonite Brethren Church, which occurred on September 5, 1860, involved both Jacob P. Becker and Heinrich Bartel. Bartel first baptized Becker, and then Becker baptized three others.

THOSE OF YOU who are descendants of Jacob, Benjamin, and Maria can be proud of the contributions that your ancestors have made in building the church. We not only recognize their achievements, but also see the same degree of commitment and dedication in their children and grandchildren. Undoubtedly, the Becker heritage is not just a significant feature in our own history and that of the church, but it is a very real and continuing influence upon the present and future course of the Mennonite Brethren Church.
—by Alan Peters

Our apologies to Alan Peters for omitting his name from the article "The Colonists: Germans Who Became Mennonites" in the March 1986 issue of the *Bulletin*.

PDC ANNIVERSARY HISTORY TO BE PUBLISHED

This November, at its annual meeting in Fresno, California, the Pacific District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches will celebrate its 75th anniversary. As part of that celebration a committee, under the direction of Mrs. Esther Jost of Reedley, has been established to publish a history of the conference. The book committee hopes to officially present the completed volume to the conference in November.

The committee has already been hard at work identifying topics and authors for the book. A tentative outline is as follows:

Immigration and Settlement, Origins of the
 PDC: Kevin Enns-Rempel
 Theology: Edmund Janzen
 Home Missions: Henry Schmidt
 Social Ministries: Arthur Jost
 Hispanic Ministries: Juan Martinez
 Education: Paul Toews
 Women's Missionary Service: Marilyn Peters
 Music: Larry Warkentin
 Youth: Dan Neufeld

It is the hope of the committee that this history will not only tell the chronological story of the conference, but also attempt to interpret that story for our situation today. What has our past meant to us? How does it affect us today? What are its implications for tomorrow? These are not always easy questions, but they are important considerations for any group interested in its own survival and success. The committee and authors hope to play a small role in furthering those purposes through this publication effort.